


Purgatory in the Popular Imagination

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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### Purpose of Thesis

This discussion of purgatory and its influence in the popular imagination relies on film as the medium of expression. The five movies selected, Jacob's Ladder, Defending Your Life, Heaven Can Wait, The Ghost and Mrs. Muir, and Heart and Souls, all depict differing thoughts about purgatory. Since the concept of purgatory has changed over time, the concepts in these movies also change. A history of the beliefs about purgatory and how those beliefs have changed, along with the examination of the five movies depicting various characteristics of purgatory, is the main purpose of this thesis.

— An old man is lying on a hospital bed. He appears to be about to take his last breath. A young woman was just told that she has a terminal illness and doesn't have long to live. What will happen after they die? Their bodies will be buried or cremated, but what then? Is that the end of their existence, or just the beginning?

Roman Catholics believe in heaven, the final positive relation with God, and hell, where the human life ends in final disaster. Additionally, they believe in the concept of purgatory. For them purgatory is the state, place or condition in the next world between heaven and hell. In this state there is purifying suffering for those who have died and are still in need of such purification. The person's suffering comes to an end only when their guilt has been expiated. Roman Catholics believe that purgatory will continue until the last judgment and then there will be only heaven and hell.

— Purgatory is "the state, place, or condition in the next world, which will continue until the last judgment, where the souls of those who die in the state of grace, but not yet free from all imperfection, make expiation for unforgiven venial sins or for the temporal punishment due to venial and mortal sins that have already been forgiven and, by so doing, are purified before they enter heaven" (Bastian, 1034). This concept, which has been believed for many years, has undergone various changes. These beliefs about purgatory, both current and past, have been depicted through various means such as novels and poems. Movies, another expression of the popular culture that portrays views of purgatory, are discussed in this paper.

Because death leaves no second chances, no time to finish the things that should have been done, eternal destiny is irrevocably decided at the moment of death and ultimately that destiny can only be heaven or hell. If only the perfect go to heaven, then how can imperfect humans expect to go directly to heaven after death, if heaven is a "land of happy souls enjoying perfection of intellect and will, instinct and impulse, of manners and habits and sweet experience, a perfection beyond human dreams"

(Daly, 146)? But, on the other hand, mediocre people are not as bad as many, so why should they go straight to hell? Because people are all human and are not perfect, they should be content to endure the purifying pain of purgatory to get to heaven. These thoughts helped to strengthen the belief in purgatory as a place that gives people a second chance, a chance to be purified for their sins. Here they are cleansed and purified if they were unable to secure these benefits before they died.

During the period of purgation, the souls in purgatory are purified and made ready to be with God. Before this purification, there is a distance between the souls in purgatory and God. There are two reasons for this distance. One reason is because all creatures are limited and finite, while God is infinite. The second reason is because all human creatures are sinners. The bridging of this gap between God and human souls is accomplished through the purification in purgatory (Hayes, 96).

Another concept associated with purgatory that was believed in the Catholic Church concerns limbo. Limbo originated in the early church as a place where unbaptized infants went after death. It was thought that, because these infants were not baptized, they were not cleansed of Original Sin and thus should not be allowed into heaven; however, since the infants had done nothing wrong, they should not be sent to purgatory. Instead, they would remain in limbo, an eternal playground, which was pleasant, but lacked the presence of God that made heaven special. These infants would not endure any suffering, except for being forbidden from God's presence. This idea did not last in the Catholic Church, however, because it was felt that these babies should not be withheld from God's presence (Burns, 2).

The central doctrine of purgatory was formulated in the mid-third century. Purgatory was not actually defined, however, until the teachings of the First and Second Councils of Lyons, the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent. Each of these teachings proclaimed varied beliefs about purgatory. In the teachings of the

Council of Lyons it was said that those who die in charity and are truly sorry for their sins, but before they have made complete satisfaction for their wrongdoings, will be purged after death by cathartic punishments (Hayes, 113). The teachings of the Council of Trent proclaimed two things. First, they proclaimed that purgation exists for some between death and the general resurrection. Second, the teachings proclaimed that souls undergoing such purgation can be aided by prayers and good works of the faithful on earth and especially by the sacrifice of the Mass (Hayes, 113).

The concept that the living might have some influence on the dead helped to strengthen the belief in purgatory. The ancient Christian procedure of praying for the dead started this belief (Hayes, 98). Before people die, they can shorten the pain that they will endure by praying and performing good deeds. After death, however, that power ceases and they must depend on others that are still living. Many felt that the concern of the living for the dead, through prayers, charitable works and the sacrifice of the Mass, could have a beneficial effect on the healing of the dead. These prayers from the living on earth were able to shorten the painful purification that the souls must go through to be cleansed of their sins. The suffering of the souls in purgatory continues until all of the unresolved guilt of that person has been resolved. It is not until these souls are completely purified that they will be ready to see the beatific vision.

Doubts about purgatory started to surface during the time of the Reformation (in England) when people began looking closely at the doctrine of purgatory and the practices of the church. They discovered that chantries – which were built by rich noblemen as shrines where a priest, supported by the annual income of a generous fund, was to say Mass daily in perpetuity for their souls – were being formed and supported to secure the relief for the souls of the founder and others who were suffering in purgatory (Kreider, 40). The more intense the belief in purgatory, the more

chantries that were formed. The fear that an excruciating purgation was in store for them after their death led people to build and finance such chantries.

By the mid-1500's, there were many doubts about the belief in purgatory. Some felt that the church's practice of selling indulgences and Masses for the dead, along with the use of the chantries, was scandalous (Kreider, 94). The clerical order was accused of using the fear of purgatory to abuse their power over people. It was thought that this was just a way for the church to make money.

In other traditions there are also similarities to the Roman Catholics' purgatory. The Greeks believed in an interim period; however they felt it was in the underworld. The Jews believed that there were shades who existed in a condition that was neither good nor bad, but was just a diminished existence (Hayes, 93). The belief in an interim period also has roots in the redemptive work of Christ. For those who believed in the redemptive work of Christ, however, the interim period is between death and the end of the world – the final day with the Lord (salvation). It was felt that no individual was fully redeemed until all the redeemed are together on the last day (Hayes, 94).

In non-Christian religions, the belief that the soul returns to history in a reincarnated state is a substitute for purgatory. It is believed that the soul is continually returned to the earthly world in new bodies so the gap between humans and God can be bridged. The souls can return to earth as many times as necessary. It is not until they are fully in tune with God that they are allowed to stay and be with God in heaven (Hayes, 100).

A similar belief held by Origen is that, in the end, there will only be heaven. God will restore the unity of creation under his rule. All enemies of Christ will be overcome by the divine love of God. They will be won over to God's side. To accomplish this, people would return to earth as often as necessary until they are in union with God (Hayes, 100).

— Instead of the Catholic concept of purgatory, some Anabaptists and Lutherans believe that the soul sleeps in the grave. There they are free from pain, but also from consciousness. The followers of Calvin felt that the soul rests, but is fully aware of being in the presence of the divine. Some Protestant thinkers also agree with Calvin in that the soul does not sleep, but participates in the divine. These believers need not worry about sleeping in the tomb until the last judgment (McDaniel, 184).

According to Thomas Burnat, there can be no individual judgment until the final judgment at the end of time. There is no purgatory, just a period of waiting. Until the last judgment, all who die will find peace, rest and comfort. The soul must wait until God winds the world down to an end before experiencing heaven or hell (McDaniel, 186).

— Emanuel Swedenborg has a different theory about what happens after death. He feels that there is a world of spirits that is neither heaven nor hell. It is a place, or a state, midway between the two. This is where a person arrives immediately after death. From here the soul can go to either heaven or hell depending on his life in the spirit world. In this spirit world, the soul has feelings, thoughts and functions just as it did on earth. The purer a soul is the more beautiful it appears to the other souls. Life in this world of spirits is very similar to earthly living. When one dies, he carries with him everything that is his except his earthly body. Also, one cannot tell that his body is a spiritual body, and not an earthly body, and thus he does not realize he has died (Swedenborg, 330).

In Swedenborg's spirit world men and women can no longer hide their true natures. Everyone is separated into categories based on their quality and quantity of heavenly love. Their love is determined through their actions on earth (McDannell, 188).

— While in Swedenborg's spirit world, the spirits are slowly educated on heavenly

matters before they can move into a higher state of spiritual being. By perfecting their psychological and spiritual outlook, spirits are moved into heaven. In this spirit world there is no punishment, just spiritual education and growth. The length of a person's stay in the spirit world depends on the extent to which the more inward elements correspond with the more outward elements (Swedenborg, 333).

After entering a higher state of heaven, Swedenborg's spirits become angels. One duty of the angels is to teach the spirits remaining in the spirit world how to discover their higher natures. To begin, the angels delight the spirits' outer senses. Then they urge the spirits to examine their own inner lives. If the spirits respond well to these, they are taught the ability to receive. If a spirit completes these teachings and is able to reach its inner self and correspond with its inner elements, then it is ready to enter heaven. Only when they have completed this final step are the spirits able to see the gates that lead to heaven. These gates are guarded by angels so no one can accidentally slip through. If for some reason the spirits are not able to connect with their inner selves and cannot get past the external, they will not be able to see the paths that lead to heaven and God. Instead the paths that lead to hell will be revealed to them. Following this theory shows that the spirits, not God, ultimately decide where to spend eternity.

These concepts of purgatory, which have changed over time, are also present in the popular culture. Through examining the following movies, it will be shown that purgatorial beliefs can be expressed in a variety of ways. The five movies selected each display a variety of characteristics of purgatory.

The first movie analyzed in conjunction with the topic of purgatory is Jacob's Ladder<sup>1</sup>. This movie appears to be about a man who was in Vietnam and was a victim

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob's Ladder (1990) produced by Alan Marshall, directed by Adrian Lyne, starring Tim Robbins (Jacob Singer), Elizabeth Pena (Jezzie), Danny Aiello (Louis), Matt Craven (Michael), Pruitt Taylor Vince (Paul), Jason Alexander (Geary), Patricia Kalember (Sarah), Macaulay Culkin (Gabe).



of chemical warfare. Underneath, however, Jacob's Ladder deals with death, purgatory, hell and heaven. The movie opens in Mekong Delta on October 6, 1971.

A helicopter is flying overhead while men sit in their combat uniforms waiting for someone to signal that the Cong are coming closer, or that there is movement in the forest around them. Suddenly someone shouts that there is, in fact, movement in the trees. Everyone jumps to his feet and grabs his weapon in preparation of what is about to happen. Everyone is shooting, including a helicopter overhead. A man, Jacob Singer, is stabbed in the stomach and many others are also injured.

Jacob is sleeping on the subway and suddenly wakes up. He tries to find out, from a lady on the subway, where they are, but she will not answer. He sees a deformed person/creature and hurries off the subway at the next stop. As soon as he gets off the subway train he finds that the station is barricaded shut. Jacob starts to walk on the tracks and steps in water. While on the tracks, he almost gets hit by another subway train.

When Jacob finally gets home, his girlfriend, Jezzie, is waiting for him. That night, while he is sleeping, he has a flashback about when he was lying on the ground in Vietnam, in pain, hoping someone would find him. When he wakes up, Jake finds out that his son was there to drop off pictures of Jake and the family, including Jake's son who died before he went to Vietnam. Jezzie does not like Jake looking at the pictures because they upset him.

After he goes to work, Jake's back starts to bother him and he has to go to his chiropractor, Louie. While Louie is treating him, Jake has another flashback of Vietnam. He is in the forest and soldiers are looking for injured people, like himself. After the flashback Jake tells Louie that he looks like an angel, an overgrown cherub.

While Jake is walking home from the doctor's office, a car tries to run him over. The car is chasing him in an alley. Luckily, he is able to duck into a doorway and

avoid being run over. As the car drives by, Jake can see that the things inside the car are not people, they are demon creatures with deformed whirling heads.

After this episode, Jake tries to go to his psychologist, Dr. Carlson. He tells the nurse that he wants to see Dr. Carlson, but she informs him that there is no one there by that name. When she goes to look for Jake's file, there is none. As she bends down, her cap falls off and Jake sees a growth on her head. After seeing this, he starts running down the hall to where Dr. Carlson's office was. When he arrives, there is a group of people there. The leader of the group tells Jake that Dr. Carlson is dead. He was killed in a car accident, an explosion.

Jake tells his girlfriend about his experiences, but she just thinks he is seeing things, letting his imagination get too carried away. That evening Jake and Jezzie go to a party. At this party a palm reader reads Jake's palm. She discovers that, according to his hand, he should already be dead. This is the first clue given that maybe Jake really isn't dreaming all of these strange things. Shortly after this, Jake starts seeing creatures again and screams. He also has another flashback of Vietnam.

When Jake and Jezzie get home from the party, Jake has an extremely high fever. To get his fever down, they put him in an ice bath. He seems to be delirious and shouts that they are killing him. He awakens with his wife Sarah. The window is open, making it very cold in the room. Jake tells Sarah that he had a dream that he was living with Jezzie. His son, Gabe, comes in and wants to be tucked into bed.

The next time Jake wakes up he is again in the tub of ice water. This is followed by another flashback scene in which medics are lifting him into a helicopter. After this short flashback, he again awakens with his girlfriend. Jake is told by doctors that he must rest. While he is at home, a man, who was in Vietnam with him, calls. This man, Paul Grunger, tells Jake that he thinks he is going crazy. Paul, too, is seeing demons similar to Jake's. Jake then talks to some of the other men who were in Vietnam with

him and discovers that all are experiencing the same symptoms. These men think they were drugged and want to sue the Army. They are never able to go through with this, however, because the men back out.

On his way home from talking to his lawyer, Jake is abducted by two men who tell him to forget about the Army. Because he is uncooperative, they beat him up. He is able to escape and jumps out of the car, but is hurt and must go to the hospital. While going down the hall to X-ray, Jake goes through old ratty hallways, a psychiatric hall with numerous crazy people, and a hall with blood and body parts on the floor. Jake is taken to a room with many doctors. His girlfriend, Jezzie, is among them. They tell him that he is dead, that he has been killed. The next scene is Sarah and the kids coming to visit him in the hospital. While they are there, a voice says "dream on".

When Jake's chiropractor, Louie, finds out what has happened to Jake, he storms in the hospital and takes Jake out to take care for him personally. While Louie is working on Jake's back he tells him something. Louie says the only thing that burns in hell is the part of you that will not let go of your life, memories and attachments. He also says that it burns them all away, not punishing you, but freeing your soul. If you are frightened of dying and holding on, you will see devils tearing your life away. If you make peace, the devils are really angels freeing you from the earth. Even after Louie's talk, Jake continues to see demons.

Jake gets a call from Michael Newman, a chemist who was in Vietnam. Michael tells Jake about the drugs they used in Vietnam and that Jake's troop killed each other, not the Cong. After his talk with Michael, Jake goes back to Sarah's house in Brooklyn. He sleeps sitting on the couch in the living room. While sleeping he has more flashbacks of Vietnam. When he wakes in the morning, he sees Gabe sitting on the stairs. They hug and Gabe asks his father to come up with him. At the top of the stairs is a great light. They walk up the stairs together, hand in hand.

The movie ends, back in Vietnam, with the doctors pronouncing Jake dead.

In comparing Jacob's Ladder to purgatory, it is obvious that the whole movie centers around purgatory. Jake's entire journey represents another version of Dante's journey through purgatory in The Divine Comedy. The capstone to this is that throughout parts of the movie, Jake is reading Dante's The Divine Comedy.

Throughout this movie there are flashbacks to Vietnam, or are the flashbacks to Jake's life with Jezzie and Sarah? When the movie starts out it is difficult to distinguish what is real and what is just Jake's memories coming to the surface. It is not until about halfway through this movie that things start to pull together. The realization that this is not just a man going crazy from the chemical warfare in Vietnam occurs when Jake has hurt his back and he is taken to the hospital. When Jake is supposed to be going to X-ray, he ends up in a surgical looking room with numerous doctors. Here they tell Jake that he is dead.

When Jake's chiropractor, Louie, finds out where Jake is, he comes and takes him out of the hospital. He takes Jake back to his office to fix his back. While in his office, Louie talks about dying, hell, devils and angels. What Louie is saying correlates directly with Jake's life. Jake is being tormented by demons, demons who are tearing his life away. These demons are like the demons of Dante's purgatory in The Divine Comedy. While Jake is in purgatory, he is reliving his memories and can not keep straight what is real and what is not.

Louie is Jake's little angel, his guide through this journey. In Dante's journey through hell and purgatory, he is led by Virgil. Virgil is able to explain things to Dante as Louie tries to do for Jake. Because Jake would not let go of his earthly life, he was chased by devils. Louie said that the only thing that burns is the part of you that will not let go of your life. He was trying to tell Jake to let go so he could be happy and move on to greater things, such as paradise.

In Jake's voyage through purgatory, he is experiencing many of the things that Dante witnessed in his voyage. Jake travels through purgatory in many ways, by helicopter, subway train and even on foot. His most common means of transportation, however, is through his mind. He is able to travel many places in his mind's eye. Jake normally travels when he sleeps. He will fall asleep in one place and wake up in another time and place. Dante also traveled in his sleep. In one experience he said "I cannot tell exactly how I got there, I was so full of sleep at that point of my journey" (Dante, 47). Another time, Dante was "defeated by sleep [and] lay down on the grass" (Dante, 234). When he awoke, he was no longer in hell, but in purgatory.

Another symbol brought from Dante's The Divine Comedy is being burned by ice. When Jake is ill and running an extremely high fever, he is put into a bath of ice. Jake feels like this ice is burning him, causing him great pain. In Dante's The Divine Comedy "the shadows [were] tortured in the ice" (Dante, 182). This ice is a burning painful ice, providing none of the the comfort normally associated with ice.

The night when Jake goes to Sarah's house after talking to Michael about the chemical warfare is also very symbolic. When he goes up to the house there is a doorman guarding the entrance. Similarly in Dante's The Divine Comedy, there are also men, "soldiers of the celestial kingdom" (Dante, 339), guarding the gates to paradise. Jake is allowed to enter because he is known and welcomed. When he enters the house it is dark, but slowly, as the realization of what is about to happen comes over him, it begins to brighten up. It is during this time that he sees his son Gabe, who was killed in a car accident years before. Gabe, who represents Beatrice in Dante's The Divine Comedy, tells Jake that it is okay now. He asks Jake to come with him. Jake is finally able to accept what has happened and is ready to let go of his life. Because of this, he is now able to go to the light, the light of heaven. Gabe and Jake walk up the stairs toward the light hand in hand. This light is also mentioned

in Dante's heaven. "The . . . light, the most beautiful among us, breathes from such love, the whole world down there desires vehemently to have news of it" (Dante, 394). To Dante, this was a "splendour of cherubic light" (Dante, 396).

The next movie analyzed in conjunction with purgatory is Defending Your Life<sup>2</sup>. Defending Your Life is a movie about what happens after death. This movie opens with a business executive, on his birthday, at the office. After leaving the office, a friend drops the executive off at the car dealership to pick up his new BMW. That same day, while Daniel, the business executive, is driving his new car, he runs into a bus and is killed.

In the next scene there are rows of people in hospital gowns being pushed in wheelchairs. Daniel is among them. These people are boarded on to a Tram. While on the Tram, they are told that they are in Judgment City and that they will be staying for five days. The atmosphere in Judgment City is very similar to earth. All of the people stay in hotels, such as the Continental where Daniel stays. When he reaches his room Daniel is told there are five stations on the television. Also he is given all of the clothes that he will need for his stay. In Judgment City all of the people who are there for their five day visit wear tupas, long white gowns.

The next morning, Daniel is called by Bob Diamond, his lawyer. Bob tells Daniel that, while he is in Judgment City, he can eat anything he wants. All of the food is delicious and it has no effect on the body. After eating a little breakfast, Daniel rides the Tram downtown to Bob Diamond's office. Here he finds out that he is in Judgment City to defend his life. Everyone in Judgment City is there to defend the fears in their life. Mr. Diamond tells Daniel that there is no hell, only heaven and Judgment City. Daniel is also told that he has been to earth close to twenty times. After each time on

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<sup>2</sup> Defending Your Life (1991) produced by Michael Grillo, directed and written by Albert Brooks, starring Albert Brooks (Daniel Miller), Meryl Streep (Julia), Rip Torn (Bob Diamond), Lee Grant (Lena Foster), Buck Henry (Dick Stanley).

earth, people return to Judgment City for this examination period so it can be decided whether they are to be returned to earth or allowed to move forward. Each lifetime is devoted to dealing with fear and only after people have adequately handled their fear on earth are they allowed to progress.

The lawyers, judges and other employees in Judgment City all use a substantial portion of their brains. Anywhere from forty-five to fifty-five percent or more is normal. All of the people on earth only use about three to five percent of their brains. This small usage of their brains is part of the reason the people on earth are not able to deal with fear as well as the people who live in Judgment City.

Daniel is very curious about his surroundings. He notices that there are no children around and asks Bob Diamond why. Bob tells him that children do not need to defend themselves. They are automatically able to move forward. Teenagers are not in Judgment City because they are too much trouble. They tear the tupas and cause too much anxiety.

After his meeting with Mr. Diamond, Daniel is free to do what he chooses until the next morning. He goes to a comedy show where a very lame comedian is performing. While at this show, Daniel meets a woman named Julia. Julia and Daniel hit it off right from the start. They talk about how they miss their families back on earth, but that it is okay. They are able to deal with it.

The next day is Daniel's first day of trial. During the proceedings the lawyers examine three different days in his life, when he was eleven, ten and one. During each time he is afraid of something and is not able to stand up for himself. These episodes from his life are shown on a screen and are made to appear very realistic, almost like three-D. After completing that day's trial, Daniel goes to a Chinese restaurant. At the restaurant he meets a man named Frank and they talk about their lives before they died. When Daniel returns to his room, there is a message from Julia

saying she misses him and wants to meet him tomorrow.

The next day of the trial is more of the same except Daniel has a substitute lawyer, Dick Stanley. Mr. Stanley does not have any rebuttals to any of the accusations that Lena Foster, the prosecutor, makes. During this day of the trial they look at days from Daniel's twenty-fourth and twenty-ninth years of life. That evening Daniel and Julia go out together to the Past Lives Pavilion. Here they are able to see who they were in their past lives.

The next day Daniel goes to his third day of trial. On this day the lawyers look at days from when he was thirty-four and thirty-one years old. During each of these days, they continue to analyze the fearful moments of Daniel's life. At the end of his trial for the day, Daniel goes to Julia's trial and sees her saving her children from a burning house. After seeing this, he realizes that Julia will go on, but he will probably be sent back to earth.

After completing the third day of trials, Daniel and Julia go out to eat. When they have finished eating, Julia asks Daniel to come and spend the night with her. Because he is afraid, he does not go with her. Daniel tries to call Julia when he returns to his hotel room, but realizes that he does not know her last name. He leaves a message telling her, and another woman named Julia, how much he loves her.

On the last day of the trial they look at a day when Daniel was thirty-six. They also look at a scene from the night before when he was afraid to spend the night with Julia. After seeing this, the judges decide that Daniel has not conquered his fears. They judge that Daniel should be returned to earth for an additional life. After getting on the tram that will return him to earth, Daniel sees Julia in a tram going to a different place. He misses her so much that he breaks loose from his seat belt and pries the doors open. He runs over to Julia's tram and tries to get on, risking the electric shock. Daniel is only able to get on her tram after the judges see how bravely he broke



through his restraints to reach the woman he loves. Because of his show of bravery, Daniel is able to move forward.

Defending Your Life portrays many similarities to and differences from the traditional view of purgatory. The most obvious similarity is that people must come here after they die. While in Judgment City, people are judged on how they handle their fears. They must defend the actions in their lives to show that they have overcome their fears. In the traditional view of purgatory, people are also judged based on the actions in their lives, however, this judgment is based on sin instead of fear.

Another aspect of purgatory that was touched on in the movie, that is also believed by Catholics, has to do with children. In Defending Your Life, children did not have to come to Judgment City and defend their fears. Similarly, in the Catholic view, children did not go to purgatory. Instead, they were sent to Limbo. This belief is no longer strongly held by the Catholic faith, but was at one time.

One difference between Judgment City and the traditional view of purgatory is the effect of prayers from people on earth. The people on earth have no effect on the lives of the people in Judgment City. There are memories, but not the pain of missing loved ones on earth. The Catholic view of purgatory, however, stresses the benefits of prayers from people on earth. According to Catholics, once someone is in purgatory, they can no longer have any affect on their destiny. The prayers from those on earth, however, can dramatically lessen purgation. In Judgment City people can affect their destiny. This is apparent by looking at Daniel's actions. He was originally sentenced to another life on earth, but because he showed courage and bravery by breaking the fears that bound him, Daniel was allowed to progress forward.

Another difference between Judgment City and purgatory has to do with how a soul is purified. Purgatory is frequently thought of as a place of purification, a place

where the soul is made pure and free. Only when the soul is pure is it able to move on to heaven. In Judgment City a soul is purified by defending its actions on earth. Also, in Judgment City, the examination is thought to be a time of spiritual growth and a time to gain additional knowledge. In the traditional view of purgatory, the soul is purified through cruel forms of punishment. One is expected to experience much pain.

An attraction in Judgment City that has nothing to do with traditional views of purgatory is the Past Lives Pavilion. Here people are able to see who they were in previous lives. The Past Lives Pavilion expresses a belief in reincarnation. When people reach Judgment City they are tested and, if they are not fit to go to heaven, are returned to earth to try to improve their lives.

Another characteristic in Defending Your Life, that is very different from the traditional view of purgatory, deals with pleasing the senses. This refers to Swedenborg's view of the spirit world. In Judgment City, as in Swedenborg's spirit world, everything is constructed to make the stay there as comfortable as possible. According to the weather station in Judgment City, it is 74 degrees and perfectly clear all the time. Also, all of the food in Judgment City is spectacular. The people here can eat as much as they want and never gain an ounce or have any bad effects from eating so much.

Another similarity between Judgment City and Swedenborg's spirit world is that the spirits must reach inside themselves. It is only when the spirits are open with themselves that they are able to progress. Also, spirits that progress come back and help those that have just arrived. This is also true in Judgment City. The souls that are acting as lawyers and judges have already gone through the whole process and have returned to Judgment City to help the newcomers.

The next movie examined is Heaven Can Wait<sup>3</sup>. This movie is about a man who is taken from this world before he was supposed to be. The situation is corrected, but only after an extreme amount of work.

Heaven Can Wait opens with Joe jogging and working out. Flashes from football practice are intertwined with Joe's workouts. Joe, who is the quarterback for the Rams', is doing exceptionally well at practice. The coaches are considering starting him instead of Jarrett, the normal starting quarterback, in the game on Sunday.

Max Corkle, one of the trainers, comes over to Joe's house and brings him a birthday cake. When Max arrives, Joe is drinking a liver and whey shake to help get himself in shape. Max tells Joe that he is going to start in the game on Sunday. When Joe discovers this, he works even harder to be his best. One thing that Joe does to prepare is to ride his bike. While he is riding, however, he is hit by a van.

The next scene shows Joe walking in the clouds with a man beside him, an escort. This escort is leading Joe to an airplane. When Joe tries to find out what is going on, he is told that he is in a way station and that the airplane will take him to his final destination. Joe thinks this is all a dream and he will not get on the plane. Mr. Jordan comes to see what is delaying the plane. When he realizes that Joe does not believe the escort, he too explains what is going on and why Joe is there. Joe still believes he is not supposed to be there. Because Joe's belief is so strong, Mr. Jordan checks and realizes that Joe, in fact, is not supposed to be there until 2025. The reason that Joe is there is because the escort, who was on his first assignment, took Joe out before he actually died. When they realize the mistake, the escort and Mr. Jordan try to correct it by putting Joe back in his body. However, they discover that his body has been cremated. Now, the only way that Joe will be able to go back to earth

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<sup>3</sup> Heaven Can Wait (1978) produced by Warren Beatty, directed by Warren Beatty and Buck Henry, written by Warren Beatty and Elaine May, starring Warren Beatty (Joe Pendleton), Julie Christie (Betty Logan), James Mason (Mr. Jordan), Charles Grodin (Tony Abbott), Dyan Cannon (Julia Farnsworth), Buck Henry (the escort), Vincent Gardenia (Lt. Krim), Jack Warden (Max Corkle).

is in another man's body. Mr. Jordan shows Joe a great many bodies, but none of them satisfy Joe. It is not until Joe and Mr. Jordan go to the home of Leo Farnsworth that the situation changes.

Leo's wife and personal confidential secretary, Tony Abbott, have drugged Farnsworth. He will be dead shortly and Joe must make a decision before someone discovers the body. At first Joe does not want this body, but he changes his mind when he hears Miss Logan talking about her problem. She lives in a town in England that is going to be destroyed by the refinery that Mr. Farnsworth's company is building. Joe feels sorry for Miss Logan and wants to help, but the only way he can is to become Mr. Farnsworth.

Joe finally decides to be Mr. Leo Farnsworth, as long as the arrangement is only temporary. Joe has plans to be in the Superbowl and he doesn't think Mr. Farnsworth's body will get him there. After becoming Mr. Farnsworth, Joe talks to Miss Logan and wants to help her, but he is not sure how. He studies the materials he finds about Mr. Farnsworth's company, Exo-gray, and asks many questions. Because Mrs. Farnsworth and Leo's private secretary, who are having an affair, think they killed Mr. Farnsworth, they are amazed and concerned that he is still alive. They believe that Leo knows they tried to kill him and is playing with their minds.

When it comes time for the board meeting of Exo-gray, Leo Farnsworth invites the press and Miss Logan into the meeting. When Leo starts talking about football and how this company is like a football team, the board members think he has gone crazy. Joe, who's soul is in Leo's body, wants to make the company a good, honest company that only makes products that are not harmful to society. After the meeting, Miss Logan comes to the house to thank Leo. They go out to eat where they notice a spark between them.

Mr. Jordan returns to see Joe and informs him that they have found some other

suitable bodies. Joe, however, has changed his mind and wants to remain Leo Farnsworth. The reason behind his change of mind is Miss Betty Logan. He feels something for her. Joe decides to remain as Leo Farnsworth, but he continues to dream about playing in the Superbowl. For this reason, he purchases fitness equipment and calls his old trainer and friend, Max. When Max comes over to Leo's house, he doesn't know Leo Farnsworth. After a long time, and a lot of talking, Joe finally gets Max to understand what happened and to believe that he really is Joe Pendleton.

While Joe trains, he continues to help Miss Logan. Because they are spending so much time together, their relationship grows stronger. Finally, Joe is able to get a tryout with the Rams as a quarterback. After quite a bit of hassle, Joe is given a real chance to play and proves his ability. Joe's dream of becoming quarterback in the Superbowl might be coming true. Unfortunately, Mr. Abbott, Leo's secretary, succeeds in ending Leo Farnsworth's life and Joe is not able to go to the Superbowl.

As it so happens, shortly after Leo Farnsworth is killed, again, Jarrett, the quarterback for the Rams, is killed in the middle of the Superbowl. Joe is there in time to take over Jarrett's body and play football again. During this whole time it has been Joe's soul in other people's bodies, but after the game Joe is no longer Joe. Joe is Jarrett and he can not remember any of what happened to him over the past weeks.

While leaving the football stadium, Jarrett runs in to Miss Logan. He feels like he knows her, but since he can not remember being Joe or Mr. Farnsworth, he does not remember her. There is however, something familiar in her eyes. Because of that familiarity, they start talking and walk off together.

This movie portrays purgatory as simply a place to wait. Everyone must stop here before going on to their final destination. In Heaven Can Wait, Joe is taken here after he is supposed to have been killed by a van. This way station, as they call it, is

where Joe goes to await his final destiny. There is no punishment or purification in this purgatory. This way station consists only of clouds, people and an airplane.

The airplane is the means of transportation from life to what comes after. This final destiny can only be reached when the time is right. In some views of purgatory, the transition between life and afterlife is made with a boat, a train, or possibly a bus.

Another characteristic of this movie that many people find similar in views of purgatory is the guardian angel. Mr. Jordan takes over Joe's case and helps him through this predicament, acting as his advisor or guardian angel. Mr. Jordan is continually trying to correct the mistake that was made by finding Joe a suitable body. He is also looking out for Joe and explaining how things work since Joe has returned to earth in another body.

One thing that most views of purgatory do not include is reincarnation. The view of reincarnation in Heaven Can Wait is not like many others. Reincarnation is not the norm here. Joe is only put back on earth in another body because of the mistake that the escort made. However, while Joe is in Mr. Farnsworth's body, he is able to correct some of the wrongs that have been committed by Mr. Farnsworth and thus increase his chances of moving onward and upward. Another difference in this interpretation of reincarnation is that Joe is still Joe when he is in the body of Mr. Farnsworth. It is not until Joe is in Jarrett's body that he actually becomes Jarrett, losing the identity of Joe forever.

The next movie, The Ghost and Mrs. Muir<sup>4</sup>, is set in London at the turn of the century. This movie is about a woman who must find a way to live with a ghost in her house. The age of the movie is obvious not only because of the people and their

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<sup>4</sup> The Ghost and Mrs. Muir (1947) produced by Fred Kohlmer, directed by Joseph Mankiewicz, written by Philip Dunne, starring Gene Tierney (Lucy Muir), Rex Harrison (the Ghost of Capt. Daniel Gregg), George Sanders (Miles Fairley), Edna Best (Martha), Anna Lee (Mrs. Fairley), Robert Coote (Coombe), Whitford Kane (Sproule).

actions, but also because it was filmed in black and white.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir opens with Lucy Muir talking to her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Eva. Lucy, who is currently living with these two women, is in the process of telling them she wants to move out. They are very disagreeable to her suggestion and do not think it would be wise for a lady and her child to be living by themselves. Lucy's husband, Edwin, is dead and Lucy feels that she and her daughter must move on. Mrs. Muir's in-laws do not understand why she would even want to live by herself. They feel she will be too lonely and will not be able to support herself.

Lucy, however, has made up her mind. After a long argument, Lucy gives them no choice. She and her daughter, Anna, and their maid, Martha, pack their things. Lucy goes ahead to look for a house for them to live in. She speaks to a house agent, Mr. Coombe, about locating something suitable. He tells her about a few houses, but purposely skips over one. Mrs. Muir wants to hear about that one, which he says just is not suitable for her. She, however, loves the description and asks to be taken to look at it. When she sees the house, Gull Cottage, she instantly falls in love. Mr. Coombe is insistent that it will not suit her. She discovers why Mr. Coombe doesn't want to show her the house when they are looking at an upstairs bedroom and hear a loud booming laugh. The house is haunted by a man, a sea captain. Captain Gregg, who lived here when he was alive, is said to have committed suicide. The captain continues to stay here and haunt the house.

Even with the ghost, Mrs. Muir decides that this house is exactly what she wants. Soon Anna, Martha and Mrs. Muir move in. The day they move in, while Mrs. Muir is taking a nap, she has a strange dream about a man watching her. When she awakens, her window is open and banging in the wind. That evening, when Lucy goes downstairs to heat water for her bed, all of the lights are blown out and she is unable to relight them because the matches keep getting blown out also.

— Mrs. Muir knows that the ghost of the sea captain is behind this and she speaks to him. After a little while she is able to light the candle and the ghost of Captain Daniel Gregg is standing before her. She tells him he is a coward to try and scare people off like he does. She also finds out that he did not commit suicide, but died accidentally. When Lucy asks the captain why he does not want anyone to live there he tells her that he wants the house to be used as a home for retired seamen. After their conversation, the captain says he will allow her to stay because she is beautiful and has spunk. The deal is, that in order to stay, she must not change the bedroom and she must put the portrait of him up in her room.

— After Lucy, Anna and Martha have been at the house for a few weeks, Lucy's in-laws come to visit her to tell her that her gold mine has stopped paying dividends. They try to talk her into returning with them, but she does not want to go. Captain Gregg helps Lucy by forcibly throwing her in-laws out the door. Daniel, the captain, devises a plan so that Lucy can continue to pay for the house. He suggests that she write a book about his life, using him as a source. Lucy, after a little persuasion, likes the idea.

Together they work on the book for weeks. Shortly before the book is done, Lucy gets a notice for late rent payments. They finish the book soon after. Lucy does not know what she will do now that the book is finished. She has spent so much of her time on this that she feels she will have nothing left after it is done. During this whole time, Captain Daniel is falling in love with Mrs. Muir and she, likewise, seems to be falling in love with him. Because he knows that they can not be together while she is alive, he tells her she must see other men.

— When Mrs. Muir goes to see the publisher with the book, she has trouble getting in to see him. At first she has trouble getting in because she does not have an appointment. A gentleman who was scheduled to see Mr. Sproule, the publisher, lets



Lucy have his time slot. When she gets in Mr. Sproule's office, he does not want to read her manuscript because he thinks it will not be worth it. However, when he discovers that the book is about a sea captain, he agrees to read it. Mr. Sproule thinks the book is great and he is willing to make a deal.

The gentleman who gave Mrs. Muir his time slot is waiting for her when she finishes talking to Mr. Sproule. He offers to get her a cab to the train station. As she is leaving, the man takes her handkerchief. Daniel is jealous of this man, especially when the man comes to return Lucy's handkerchief. This man, Mr. Fairley, also paints a portrait of Lucy. After seeing each other a few more times Lucy has fallen for Mr. Fairley. When the captain realizes this, he disappears and makes everything that happened between Lucy and him appear as a dream to Lucy.

Soon after, Mrs. Muir receives a letter from Mr. Fairley that says he is going to London for a few days and will have to break their plans. Since Lucy has to go to pick up her check from Mr. Sproule, she decides to surprise Mr. Fairley and show up at his house. However, she is surprised when she realizes that he is married and has children.

Years pass and young Anna, Lucy's daughter, is away at college. She comes home to see her mother and to tell her that she is getting engaged. When they are talking, Lucy discovers that Anna also talked to Captain Daniel. The next scene shows Lucy years later when she receives a letter from Anna saying that Lucy, Anna's daughter, is engaged. That afternoon Mrs. Muir dies in her sleep. Captain Gregg comes back for Lucy and they go off together arm in arm.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir does not focus directly on purgatory, but rather, indirectly on some of the aspects of purgatory. One theme of this movie is the expiation of sins. Captain Gregg, who is dead, has haunted the house that he lived in for years. It is not until Mrs. Muir arrives that he changes his ways. He helps her to

earn money by writing a book. This is his way of showing Mrs. Muir that he is no longer the same man and is willing to accept her.

Another way that Captain Gregg tries to atone for his past sins is to put the house to a good use. He wants to help all of the seamen who don't have a place to stay by opening his home to them. This is his way of showing that he really does care about others and how they survive.

The final way that Captain Daniel Gregg must make up for his sins was with Mrs. Muir. Because he treated women badly while he was alive, he is punished. His punishment was falling in love with a living woman whom he could not have. He must learn to deal with his jealousy and let go of her. It is not until he controls his jealousy that he will really be able to have her. Because he was able to let her live her own life, without his interference, Captain Gregg is able to be with her forever.

Captain Gregg is punished because of his past sins. In the time after his death, he must atone for those sins and, through his time with Mrs. Muir, he is able to do so. It is because of this purification that he and Mrs. Muir are able to move forward.

The final movie examined in conjunction with purgatory is Heart and Souls<sup>5</sup>. This movie has two main settings – San Francisco in 1959 and San Francisco in 1994. As Thomas grows up, four souls are unable to leave him and they do not understand why.

The movie opens with a variety of different scenes involving many characters. The first is a man and woman who are about to have a baby. They get in the car and head for the hospital. Unfortunately, they are not able to make it there before the baby arrives.

Another character, Harrison, is getting ready to audition for a singing part. He

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<sup>5</sup> Heart and Souls (1994) produced by Nancy Roberts and Sean Daniel, directed by Ron Underwood, starring Robert Downey Jr. (Thomas), Charles Grodin (Harrison), Kyra Sedgwick (Julia), Elizabeth Shue (Anne), Tom Sizemore (Milo), Alfre Woodard (Penny).

has a severe case of stage fright and has let everyone else go before him. When his time comes to sing, he stands up in front of the judges, but is unable to perform. He is afraid of failing and thus does not try.

A third character is a waitress, named Julia, who is working in a bar. While she is working, the man she has been dating comes in to see her. Julia has been staying in the city for a few months and has not seen him. This man, John, tells her that he bought land for them. Julia, however, is not ready to give up the city life to live with him so he finally gives up on her and goes home by himself.

Penny is tucking her children in to bed. She is yet another character seen in the first few minutes of Heart and Souls. She is getting ready to go to work and, because she works nights, she must tuck her children in bed before she leaves. Her son Billy asks her to sing "Hug-a-bye bear" so he will be able to sleep easier. She sings to her children and then leaves to go to work.

The final character that is introduced in Heart and Souls is Milo. He is inside a man's house trying to steal stamps. What is not evident in the beginning is that he is stealing them so he will be able to return them to the little boy that he stole them from originally. Unfortunately, the man who owns the house catches Milo in the act. Milo is able to get away, but without the stamps.

Each one of these people, except the pregnant woman and her husband, get on the same bus to go to their respective destinations. The bus driver becomes preoccupied with a beautiful woman in the car next to him. He watches her more than the road and must swerve to keep from hitting a car and instead goes off of a bridge. The car that he almost runs into is the car with the pregnant woman and her husband.

After the bus goes over the bridge, the four people and the bus driver float on air above the bus. The driver floats up to the sky, but the other four are pulled toward the car with the woman. At the same moment a baby boy, Thomas, is born. Julia,

Harrison, Penny and Milo discover that they are no longer alive and that they are unable to leave Thomas because they are somehow attached to him.

They do not know why they are stuck to Thomas, but they seem to be enjoying it. As he grows up, Thomas learns that most other people do not have invisible friends like he does. Because of his imaginary friends, his parents think he is going crazy. When Penny, Julia, Harrison and Milo hear this, they know that they must help Thomas. They decide to become invisible to him so he will be like other kids.

Heart and Souls then skips to Thomas at about thirty years old. He is a working man with a good job, a good car and a wonderful girlfriend. Thomas goes to meet his girlfriend, Anne, for lunch. She tells him that her parents are going to be in town and that she would like him to meet them. Meeting parents scares Thomas, because it means that they are building a relationship.

While Thomas and Anne are having lunch a bus drives into the building. Only Julia, Penny, Harrison and Milo can see this bus. It has come to take them all to heaven to be used for another life. When the bus driver, who was also the bus driver that got them killed in the first place, tells them it is time to go, they protest and do not want to leave. The bus driver tells them that they have had plenty of time to resolve their lives, to do the one thing they would have done before they died if they would have had more time. When the four of them hear this they are amazed. They had not realized that is why they were with Thomas for all these years. Now that they know what to do, they are even more adamant about staying. Because no one told them and because the bus driver feels bad about killing them, he tries to buy them a little more time. He says he will let them stay as long as possible, but whenever he needs a soul, he will be back.

Now that they know what they are supposed to do, they try to get Thomas' attention. He, however, cannot see them. They have to concentrate and work together

to get him to see them again. They finally succeed, but it scares Thomas so much that he wrecks his car. He wakes up in the hospital and sees the four of them standing there. He remembers them, but he does not want to have anything to do with them. He thinks that he is just having hallucinations until another woman is also able to see them. When he realizes they are really there, he is upset at them for leaving him so many years ago.

Thomas does not want to help them and he is not going to until they cause a scene in his office. They are able to enter his body and, by doing so, control his actions. When Thomas realizes that he will not be able to get rid of them, he decides he can do nothing but help them. He must help each of them do the one thing they would have done if they had not died when they did.

Milo gets to go first. He wants Thomas to steal back the stamps that he stole and return them to the kid. After a lot of chaos and almost getting caught, Thomas is able to get the stamps. After they have returned them to the kid, who is now a grown man with a family, Milo is finally satisfied. The man is extremely happy to have his stamps back. Almost immediately after the stamps are returned, the bus comes to take one of them away. Since Milo is the only one who has resolved his life, he is the one to go. During this time Thomas was supposed to meet Anne's parents, but the stamp stealing caused him to be late and miss them.

Next they decide to try to find Penny's kids. They go to her old neighborhood to see if anyone knows what happened to her children, but no one seems to know anything. Finally, they are able to locate one woman who was around when Penny was still alive and she tells them that the girls are in San Diego, but she has lost track of Billy. They leave and head for San Diego to find the girls.

On the way to San Diego, they see signs for a B.B. King concert. They stop and manage to get back stage. Once they get back stage, they cannot get Harrison to sing.

He is still too afraid. Finally Thomas gets mad at him and tells Harrison that he died a failure because he never tried. That startles Harrison and he goes on stage to sing. As soon as he finishes his song, the bus comes again. This time Harrison gets on the bus because he has fulfilled his life.

Thomas is arrested for being on stage and taken to the police station. He finally talks his way out of it and is getting ready to leave when he backs his car into a police car. The policeman comes out to see what has happened. While they are looking at the cars the bus comes to take either Penny or Julia. At the same time, the policeman's wife and child show up. The child is upset and the policeman takes him and starts singing "Hug-a-bye bear". It is at that moment that Penny realizes he must be her Billy because she made that song for him. Thomas tells Billy where his sisters are. Penny is now able to leave because she knows at least one of her children is safe.

Next they travel to John's farm so Julia will be able to rectify her wrongs. They get to his front door and the bus arrives to take Julia away. They hurry and knock on the door only to find out that John is dead, and has been for seven years. It is then that Julia realizes that she is supposed to keep Thomas from making the same mistake with Anne, that she made with John. She makes Thomas promise that he will talk to Anne. Now she is able to leave peacefully on the bus and Thomas is able to return home and talk to Anne. He tells Anne that he loves her and he needs her.

This movie is similar to The Ghost and Mrs. Muir because it does not refer directly to purgatory, but indirectly to some of the beliefs that surround purgatory. In Heart and Souls each of the five people that are killed must atone for their past sins. They are not able to move forward until that has been done. These people are able to accomplish this through the use of Thomas' body.

Milo, the first one to right his wrongs, does so by returning the stamps that he

stole over thirty years ago. When he returns them, the look on that man's face makes him feel that giving them back was all worth while. He has finally made right what he did wrong while he was alive.

For Harrison, it was more a sin of omission than a direct sin. He was unable to face an audience and sing, therefore cheating himself out of a great pleasure in life, the feeling of success. He has let his fear get the best of him and he must overcome it before he can move on. He is able to do this when he, through Thomas' body, sings in front of a huge audience.

Penny must make up for leaving her children alone at night. She must go to work, but because she left them alone, she can never rest. It is not until she finds her son that she is able to be happy.

The sin that Julia committed was not recognizing her true feelings. She loved John, but she let him slip away. To ease her mind and be able to go forward, Julia must prevent Thomas from making the same mistakes that she did.

Finally, the bus driver, too, must pay for his sins. He must pay for looking around while he was driving and getting his passengers killed. His punishment is to drive the bus that goes around and picks up souls that are ready to move on.

This movie also touches on a form of reincarnation. The souls are not reincarnated into another body, but instead are attached outside, similar to guardian angels. There is another reference to reincarnation when the bus driver comes and says he will let them stay until their soul is needed for a new baby. It appears that after they leave Julia, Penny, Milo and Harrison will be in another body.

Another feature of purgatory that is evident in this movie is transportation. There is always some form of transportation between life, death, purgatory, heaven or hell. In Heart and Souls the bus is their means of transportation. This is how they are brought to this point and is also how they move forward.

Each of the five movies was selected because it represents beliefs about what purgatory could or might be. Different concepts of purgatory, now and in the past, are depicted in these movies. Purgatory has been thought of as a place or state of suffering for one's sins. This belief is still alive today, although it is not as strong. Also, the belief that there is a special place for unbaptized babies was one time strong, but has faded over time.

The Roman Catholic view of purgatory is best illustrated in Jacob's Ladder. Here there is pain and suffering that the soul must endure. Before Jacob is able to move forward, he must let go of his earthly life. When he does this, he is able to go toward the light with his son Gabe and other souls in purgatory.

A more heaven-like view is illustrated in Defending Your Life, which shows purgatory as a wonderful place to be where people happened to get judged on their life. All of the pleasures of earth are present here, without any of the pain. Defending Your Life portrays a view of purgatory that people would like to imagine because it is easy to be there and the time there is only a maximum of five days.

Heaven Can Wait shows yet another view in which purgatory is only a way station, a place to take a pit stop on the way to either heaven or hell. In this movie, it is just a stop over until the souls are sent to their final destiny. There is also no pain involved in this view, making it very unlike the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir and Heart and Souls both relate to ways in which people may be punished in order to redeem themselves for their sins. In both movies, characters must atone for something that they did wrong while they were alive. This atonement for sins is the basis behind the Roman Catholic view of purgatory. In these two movies, however, this atonement does not involve pain as it does in the traditional view.

Beliefs about purgatory are constantly changing. This is evident, not only



through research of factual material, but also through fictional pieces such as the movies discussed above. The concept of purgatory has changed, and will continue to change, over time. These beliefs, both present, past and future, will continue to be depicted in the popular culture for centuries to come.

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